

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) re-introduced the Southern Sea Otter Recovery and Research Act to support and organize sea otter research and population recovery programs under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior.

“Sea otters are a California icon, attracting tens of thousands of visitors to the Central Coast and playing a crucial role in maintaining our unique kelp-bed communities,” said Rep. Farr. “Sadly, these wonderful creatures were hunted close to extinction in the early 20th century. We’ve been fighting to bolster their numbers for more than 60 years, and this bill will be a big step in that direction.”

Bringing the Southern sea otter population up to sustainable levels will have the added benefit of increasing Central Coast tourism revenue. Otters and their fans bring hundreds of thousands of tourism dollars every year to coastal California communities. A sustainable sea otter population will also help restore commercially valuable West Coast rockfish stocks; as an ecological “keystone species,” sea otters are critical to maintaining habitat and food sources the fish need to survive.

Goals of the legislation:

- Require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to carry out a recovery program to include measures for the protection of sea otters; reduction or elimination of human-related factors harming sea otter recovery; and public education and outreach efforts.
- Since this bill was first introduced in 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has established a Sea Otter Recovery Implementation Team and a Science Advisory Subcommittee, but both groups exist at the whim of government. This bill would codify both entities into law.
- Provide \$3 million annually for conservation and protection initiatives and \$2 million annually for research programs through a series of competitive grants. Require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to carry out a recovery program to include measures for the protection of sea otters; reduction or elimination of human-related factors harming sea otter recovery; and public education and outreach efforts.

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"This bill was crafted with the input of fishermen, sea mammal rescue groups, scientists and environmentalists. Thanks to the efforts of these dedicated people who understand just how critical sea otters are to the health of our coastal environment, I am hopeful that this bill will become law," Farr added. "Our goal is to look after this threatened population so it can grow to the point where we can finally remove the sea otter from the Endangered Species Act list."

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